
Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Now Consumers Can Tell It to the FTC — Toll-Free

Washington, D.C. — A product you bought through an Internet auction months ago still hasn't been delivered. A newspaper ad offers "Guaranteed Loans," but requires a fee up front. A fabulous prize offer comes in the mail, but requires a fee before you can claim it. A scholarship service promises easy money for college — as long as you send in a check.

Sound familiar?

The Federal Trade Commission says even wary and sophisticated consumers face a barrage of fraudulent offers every day. The FTC ought to know: last year, the agency logged in over 60,000 complaints from consumers.

Now, the FTC is making it easier — and cheaper — for consumers to report a fraud to the law enforcement agency through a toll-free Consumer Help Line, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). The line is staffed by counselors from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

According to Jodie Bernstein, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, the toll-free number offers consumers a two-fer. It makes the agency more accessible to consumers who want to report a fraud, and it makes their valuable complaint data available to law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and Canada. "That's important because fraud has moved beyond the front porch to cyberspace and all points in between," Bernstein said.

Consumer fraud complaints to the FTC are entered into a database that is available to nearly 200 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and Canada. They use it to spot fraudulent activity, trends and wrong-doers — and stop them.

"Through the toll-free Help Line, consumers can get helpful information on the spot," Bernstein said. "Obviously, the FTC can't intervene in individual disputes, but consumer complaint information is crucial to the enforcement of consumer protection laws. The information that consumers get on a particular issue also lessens the likelihood that they'll be scammed again. Education is a powerful consumer protection."

To report a complaint or get free information call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP, visit www.ftc.gov, or write FTC, Consumer Response Center, Washington, DC 20580-0001.

Toll-free 1.877.FTC.HELP For the Consumer